

WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS AND ELLIPSE
(Reservation No. 1)
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS NO. DC-689

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649-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
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Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WHITE HOUSE GROUNDS AND ELLIPSE
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Location: Between 15th and 17th streets, Constitution and Pennsylvania avenues.

Owner/Manager: U. S. government, National Park Service.

Use: Residential grounds, ceremonial space, and monument site.

Significance: Reservation No. 1 encompasses the majority of the land set out by Pierre L'Enfant for the President's Grounds. Second only to the U. S. Capitol Grounds in national importance, this property was situated on an elevated bluff overlooking the Potomac River. Today the reservation is divided into two distinct regions--the private and protected White House Grounds significant in connection with every president since John Adams, and the open public expanse to the south, known as the Ellipse, that features numerous monuments and serves as a site for ceremonies, celebrations, and demonstrations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of plan: 1791, L'Enfant Plan; 1792, Ellicott Plan.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The land purchased by the federal government in 1792 for the President's Grounds was included in several tracts. The southern portion was owned by David Burnes; the northern segment, within patent held by the Peerce family since 1687, was purchased in May 1791 by Georgetown merchant and land speculator Samuel Davidson who signed it over to the federal government the following month.¹
3. Initial and subsequent alterations:

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|-----------|---|
| 1790s: | President's House and flanking executive office buildings erected. |
| 1814-15: | President's House and executive offices burned by British then rebuilt. |
| 1818: | Iron fence designed by Paulus Hedl erected on north side of the White House. |
| ca. 1821: | Pennsylvania Avenue extended along the north side of the White House, separating the President's Grounds from the |

¹ McNeil, 44, 50.

public common to the north (See Lafayette Park HABS No. DC-676).

- 1833: Gates on the north side of the house reset, north drive reconfigured as it remains today.
- 1836: New U.S. Treasury building begun east of the President's House.
- ca. 1860: Treasury Building extended to the south.
- 1872: Canal at the south end of the Ellipse converted to a culvert and a roadway constructed on its former path.
- 1871-88: State War and Navy building erected west of the White House.
- 1870-88: Ellipse brought to grade and landscaped.
- 1880: Bulfinch Gatehouses moved to the south corners of the Ellipse from the U.S. Capitol Grounds.
- 1901-02: White House extensively renovated.
- 1903: Memorial to William Tecumseh Sherman erected on the Ellipse south of the Treasury Building.
- 1913: Butt-Millet Memorial Fountain erected on the northwest side of the Ellipse.
- 1923: Zero Milestone erected on the north side of the Ellipse. Statue of Alexander Hamilton erected on the south grounds of the Treasury Building.
- 1924: Memorial to the First Division erected on the northwest side of the Ellipse near the State War and Navy Building.
- 1936: Memorial erected to honor the Original Patentees of the District of Columbia on the east side of the Ellipse near 15th Street. Memorial erected to the Second Division in the southwest corner of the Ellipse.
- ca. 1942: West Executive Avenue between the White House and State War and Navy Building closed to the public.
- 1964: Boy Scout Commemorative Tribute erected on the east side of the Ellipse.

- 1969: Haupt Fountains erected on each side of the 16th Street axis on the south side of the Ellipse.
- 1975: Swimming pool excavated on southwest side of White House grounds.
- 1976: Last segment of Hedl's gates removed, replaced with modern reinforced reproductions.
- 1986: East Executive Avenue closed to all but official vehicles and converted to pedestrian walk.

B. Historical Context:

The rectangular expanse bounded by 15th, 17th, and H streets and Constitution Avenue was originally "reserved" for the "President's Palace" on Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for the city of Washington. On Andrew Ellicott's plan of 1792, City Square Nos. 167 and 221 were carved out of the north corners of the space to be sold for private development. The approximately 83 acres that remained were purchased by the government as "Appropriation No. 1," one of seventeen reservations set aside for public buildings.

The land L'Enfant chose for the President's House lay due north of the fork of the Potomac and Eastern Branch rivers that framed the capital city. This orientation provided a view from the appropriation south down the river, and likewise placed the executive mansion in a direct line of vision for approaching ships. The terrain of the parcel consisted of a ridge to the north, known today as the Wicomico Terrace, that sloped gently southward to the Goose Creek where the waterline changed with the tides. Looking at the proposed site, City Commissioner David Stuart noted that the site was an "immense and gloomy wilderness suitable for despotic governments but not for the United States."²

Nevertheless, the federal government purchased this land at a rate roughly equivalent to \$66 per acre from speculator Samuel Davidson and original proprietor David Burnes. Although Burnes was stubborn about donating portions of his land to the federal government, his vast holdings were located in the heart of the early city, making his only heir, Marcia Burnes Van Ness, one of the young city's wealthiest inhabitants.

The first notable improvement to this large expanse was the construction of the President's House beginning in 1792. At George Washington's request the executive offices were also erected in Appropriation No. 1 near the executive mansion rather than on Capitol Hill. By the time President John Adams and his wife, Abigail, moved in in 1800, the incomplete house was flanked by the Treasury Building on the east and the War Department on the west and was surrounded by a unimproved expanse cluttered with construction materials and abandoned brick kilns. The poor condition of the grounds was due to a lack of funds, not a lack of vision. L'Enfant

² Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, A History of the National Capital, Vol. 1, 121-122, as quoted in O'Brien, 12.

had planned the President's House about five times larger than it was built and envisioned terraced lawns leading south down the slope to a large pond near the river. Despite piecemeal efforts to improve the grounds, it would be decades before land surrounding the executive mansion would take on the park-like appearance foreseen by the city founders.

Thomas Jefferson, who defeated Adams in the 1800 election, moved into the house in 1801 and made the first effort to landscape the grounds. Under his administration, the three city commissioners were abolished, and a Superintendent of Public Buildings was appointed to oversee the maintenance and improvement of Washington's federal land. Meanwhile, Jefferson drew up his own design for the landscape of the President's Grounds. Infusing popular English and French traditions, his plan featured both radial allees and romantic serpentine walks. Although the extent to which these plans were carried out is unknown, Jefferson did build a wall around the President's Grounds, making the first distinction between the private space of the presidential residence and the public commons beyond. Between 1802-08 ground-floor wings were added to the east and west sides of the executive mansion to house servants, privies, and work areas. Outbuildings for the flanking departmental buildings were also incorporated in the jumbled landscape of Appropriation No. 1. A triumphal arch southeast of the house formed an entry to the grounds from Pennsylvania Avenue.³ Despite Jefferson's plans, the raw appearance of the President's Park elicited comment, such as the following description made by an English visitor in 1807:

The ground around it instead of being laid out in a suitable style is in a condition so that in a dark night instead of finding your way to the house, you may, perchance, fall into a pit, or stumble over a heap of rubbish. The fence around the house is of the meanest sort; a common post and rail enclosure. The parsimony destroys every sentiment of pleasure that arises in the mind in viewing the residence of the president of a nation and is a disgrace to the country.⁴

The meager improvements made in this appropriation and throughout the early city were largely destroyed in 1814 when the British invaded and burned most of the federal buildings. Within Appropriation No. 1, the President's House and flanking department buildings were gutted by fire. Despite proposals to abandon the smoldering city and move the capital to a new locale, rebuilding began in Washington the following year. To oversee citywide reconstruction Congress created a Commission of the District of Columbia in 1816 and appointed the first Commissioner of Public Buildings, whose successors would oversee the development of the city's federal land until 1867. Appropriation No. 1 once again became a work yard as the executive mansion and the departments of Treasury, State, War, and Navy were reconstructed. The most evident landscape feature at the time was, perhaps, a simple

³ Seale, 47.

⁴ Olmsted, 62.

vegetable garden for the president's kitchen. Refuse cleared from the burned wreckage was dumped on the unimproved grounds to the south, only to be discovered 161 years later during excavations for a swimming pool for President Gerald Ford.⁵

After the new house was complete, security-conscious President James Monroe oversaw the installation of an iron fence and gate with substantial locks in 1818.⁶ Designed by Paulus Hedl, the ornamental fencing remained on the grounds until the 1970s when the last remaining section was reproduced in heavier materials and securely anchored in concrete, at the request of the security-conscious Secret Service. Monroe also appended a stable to the west wing with an adjacent brick-paved courtyard.⁷ In honor of General Lafayette's historic visit to Washington in 1824, the common north of the house, separated from the President's Park by Pennsylvania Avenue, was improved for the first time. From then forward it became known as Lafayette Square and was considered separate from the rest of Appropriation No. 1 (See Lafayette Square HABS No. DC-676).

John Quincy Adams' administration from 1825-29 brought more improvements to the grounds. Paved paths and formal gardens were laid out in the proximity of the executive mansion and the grounds were embellished with hundreds of seedlings, including walnut, persimmon, tulip, oak, willow catalpa, chestnut, and honey locust. Two terms under President Andrew Jackson from 1829-37 brought even greater change to the President's Park and the city as a whole. During this period the Tiber Creek, which often flooded up over the south side of the public grounds, was controlled to some extent by construction of the city canal that ran along the path of today's Constitution Avenue. Meanwhile, the White House Grounds were supplied with fresh water channelled through underground pipes from natural springs in nearby City Square No. 249, purchased for this purpose by the federal government in 1833 (See Franklin Park, HABS No. DC-673). The piped water cascaded into a clay and sand-lined reservoir east of the executive mansion between the State Department and Treasury Building.⁸ The lawn south of the White House was graded and laid with garden paths. With the completion of the portico on the north front in 1830, Monroe's serpentine fence was replaced with a straight, heavy, ornamental iron fence. The original gates and piers of Hedl's fence were moved farther apart to permit a wide drive, configured much the same as today.⁹

By 1833 the exterior of the mansion appeared much as it would for several decades to come.¹⁰ Improvements continued, however, on formalizing the surrounding grounds. In 1834 ailanthus, ash, sugar maples, elms, sycamores,

⁵ O'Brien, 59.

⁶ Seale, 167.

⁷ Seale, 67.

⁸ Seale, 88.

⁹ O'Brien, 77.

¹⁰ Seale, 76.

lindens, oaks, and horse chestnuts were shipped in from nurseries in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, bulbs were planted, and trellises were built for roses. A two-acre flower garden south of the house was protected by a wood-board fence. In 1835 a sentry box was erected on the grounds after an assassination attempt on Jackson's life. Soon after the orangery burnt down at Mount Vernon in 1835, a similar structure was established on the White House grounds atop the foundations of Jefferson's treasury vault west of the house. This tradition of greenhouses on the grounds continued until the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹ The Treasury Building east of the executive mansion burned in 1833, and Jackson reputedly selected the site for its replacement--within the line of sight L'Enfant planned between the White House and Capitol (See Pennsylvania Avenue, HABS No. DC-706). The new Greek-Revival building was designed by Robert Mills and largely complete by 1842, although it was expanded to the south in 1861, the west in 1864, and the north in 1869.¹²

During the administrations of President's Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, and John Tyler, little more than routine maintenance was performed on the federal grounds, but in 1848 during the administration of James K. Polk, a bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson was moved from the Capitol Grounds to a pedestal near the north front entrance of the executive mansion. Growing national confidence, bolstered by victory in the Mexican War, prompted further expansion of federal buildings. The extension of the Treasury Building to the south in 1861 further obscured the planned vista to the Capitol and marked the demise of the triumphal-arch entry to the White House Grounds. By this time, however, an elliptical roadway ran through the appropriation between the private President's Grounds to the north and the public land to the south, to carry traffic between 15th and 17th streets.

Although the grounds surrounding the White House and the departmental buildings were landscaped and enclosed, the large expanse to the south between the President's House and canal remained an unimproved open common surrounded by a shabby white picket fence. In 1851, during Millard Fillmore's administration, the Commissioner of Public Buildings secured renowned landscape designer Andrew Jackson Downing to propose landscape schemes for the city's parks. For the most part, Downing retained the configuration of roads around the President's House, but he prescribed new treatment for the southern part of the appropriation. In this large common he inscribed a large round lawn circled by a roadway labelled "Parade or President's Park." Downing's unexpected death in 1852 and the outbreak of the Civil War halted implementation of these plans for several decades, but his vision of a round open space engendered the formation of the Ellipse that remains in place today.

During the war, the open common was commandeered by the Union troops and used as a corral for cattle and horses. The land was referred to as the "White Lot" probably because of the white fence around it. The White House suffered under the strain of the war, and soon after the return of peace, architect Alfred B. Mullett oversaw the 1866 demolition of its east wing and its replacement with a one-story

¹¹ Seale, 206.

¹² Caemmerer, 380.

colonnaded porch.¹³

President Abraham Lincoln had often opted to sleep at the Soldier's Home in northwest Washington rather than endure the stench wafting up from the tidal flats at the mouth of the Tiber River less than a half mile south of the White House. The failing health of Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, was largely attributed to this bad air, and proposals were made to relocate the President's House and park far from "the pestilent flat on which a large portion of the sewerage of the city is cast to fester in the sun"¹⁴ In 1866, Nathaniel Michler, a U. S. Army Corps Engineer experienced in military mapping, surveyed the city's northern reaches in search of a new site for the executive mansion. Six weeks after he completed his study, control of the federal land in the city was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers through its newly created Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G), and Michler was appointed to its helm. This not only transferred the federal land from the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior to the Department of War, but it also put Michler in the position to carry out the proposals he made in his report.¹⁵ With the election of Ulysses S Grant in 1868, plans to move the executive mansion fell by the wayside, but the OPB&G continued to oversee management of the President's House and development of the federal land around it until the 1930s.

First Lady Julia Grant reputedly loved the "dear old house," and her reign brought improvements to the executive mansion and its grounds. Michler oversaw the expansion of the White House greenhouse built on the west side of the house in 1857; as the greenhouses increased in popularity over the ensuing decades, the buildings were expanded to encompass much of the region west of the house.¹⁶ With a new commitment to the old executive mansion, the OPB&G fully improved the entire appropriation over the next decade. The southern portion of Appropriation No. 1, or the "White Lot" had been partially filled with cartloads of muck hauled up from the noxious canal during a futile dredging attempt in 1866. The industrious Board of Public Works of a territorial government installed in 1871--during this era of congressional generosity--abandoned the canal altogether converting it into a sewer and building a roadway along its former path. Although the territorial government was dissolved in debt and scandal in 1874, its Board of Public Works, under the leadership of Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, transformed the city from a war-torn backwater to a bustling metropolitan center.

The public buildings and grounds remained under the OPB&G, which worked closely with the local government to coordinate the building projects. In 1872, the OPB&G performed a survey of the federal grounds in the city and published a list in its annual report. The President's Grounds comprised nearly 81 acres and were described as follows:

¹³ Seale, 117.

¹⁴ Cowdrey, 24.

¹⁵ Seale, 121.

¹⁶ Seale, 116-17.

The north half of these grounds is improved, well lighted, and inclosed in the greater part with substantial iron fences, and surrounded with stone walks, interspersed with choice trees and evergreens, well drained and a plentiful supply of water, making them in good condition. The south half unimproved and being filled to grade, as established by Board of Public Works on 15th and 17th streets.¹⁷

In 1871 the hulking State, War, and Navy Building was begun west of the White House to consolidate the three departments under one immense roof. The excavations provided additional fill for the White Lot. By the time the structure was finished almost twenty years later in 1888, Appropriation No. 1 was nearly complete. Funds were allocated throughout the early 1870s to drain and fill the grounds, but the pace was not quick enough for OPB&G Chief Col. Thomas Lincoln Casey who wrote in 1877:

The improvement of the southern portion in the immediate vicinity and in full view of the mansion progresses very slowly, and consists mainly in grading such soil, clay, and refuse material as may be deposited therein by contractors and others, who find this a convenient dumping ground. To properly complete the grading of this reservation would require a large appropriation to purchase a sufficient quantity of soil; after which the other improvements could be vigorously pressed forward to completion.¹⁸

Casey received an allocation of \$15,000 the following year, and by 1879, the grounds had been sodded and cleared of old trees, and a row of elms were planted. Grading, planting, and laying walks continued into the next decade, and by 1887 Lt. Col. John M. Wilson described the results as follows:

The southern portion of the President's Park except a limited area still occupied by the stone yard and workshops of the State, War, and Navy Building, has been improved; gravel roads and walks have been laid out for public travel, the lawn surfaces have been arranged, and the planting of the ground with natural groups of ornamental evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs has been nearly completed. No arrangements for lighting these grounds have yet been made.¹⁹

Soon after the State, War, and Navy Building was completed, the OPB&G removed the old work shed in its vicinity and improved the grounds. By 1894, the roadway around the Ellipse was illuminated by seven electric lamps. Hundreds of trees were planted in the region outside of the Ellipse while a row of elms surrounded the central open lawn. While the White House grounds featured three fountains--one

¹⁷ Annual Report . . ., 1872, 23.

¹⁸ Annual Report . . ., 1877, 8.

¹⁹ Annual Report . . ., 1880, 2594.

on the south installed under Andrew Johnson, one on the north erected under Grant, and one on the east--the only built features on the Ellipse were Charles Bulfinch's Capitol gatehouses, moved from the Capitol Grounds during expansion and enlargement in 1874 and relocated to the southeast and southwest corners of President's Park in 1880.

As the OPB&G improved Appropriation No. 1 it also accomplished similar effects in many of the other 301 federally owned reservations throughout the city. In the 1880s-90s, the OPB&G identified and carefully surveyed all the land in the city that was transferred to the United States in 1792 and assigned numbers to each parcel. President's Park headed the list as Reservation No. 1. Lafayette Park, although originally a part of Appropriation No. 1, was officially acknowledged as a separate parcel designated as Reservation No. 10.

Washingtonians and visitors to the city attended band concerts, religious revivals, and reunions in the improved southern portion of Reservation No. 1. As cycling became a national rage, park officials tried to curb the "scorchers" who raced around the park's elliptical path endangering more passive recreators. In 1892 the OPB&G lamented damage done to the grounds during the encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic, but in 1896 the site was used again for a massive tent revival of the Christian Endeavor Association.²⁰

Besides maintaining federal parks, the OPB&G was also responsible for policing them--a problem in the former White Lot. OPB&G Officer Theodore Bingham wrote in 1899:

At night this large area with thickets of shrubs is absolutely defenseless, as there is no night watchman. After dark no decent woman, or couple of them, dare go through these grounds, and it has on several occasions proved dangerous for men. Robberies and other crimes occur here every now and then, and this within 1,000 yards of the Executive Mansion. It is a reproach that this part of the National Capital should be the haunt of the criminal classes of the city, especially in the spring and summer when the parks should be the safest.²¹

The neighborhood near the Ellipse had been a haven for crime ever since the Civil War, gaining the region to the east within the triangle bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue and the Mall the nickname "Murder Bay." As the city approached its centennial in 1900, various federal and private groups began discussing the condition of the city and the possibility of its redesign and improvement. During his 1889-93 presidential term, Benjamin Harrison and his wife, Caroline, had lobbied for the expansion of the President's House in honor of the centennial of the presidency. These plans were shelved throughout Grover Cleveland's second administration, but were brought to the fore again as the city's centennial neared.²²

²⁰ Goode, 128.

²¹ Annual Report . . ., 1899, 3846.

²² Seale, 154.

During William McKinley's term, Col. Theodore Bingham of the OPB&G had grand visions for the entire city. In addition to drawing up a scheme for the redesign of the Mall, he also planned an extensive enlargement of the 100-year-old White House. Michigan Sen. James McMillan, chairman of the Senate District Committee, was angry that Bingham had not consulted him first with the scheme and subsequently enlisted a committee of world-renowned designers to examine the city and make proposals for its development. By the time the McMillan Senate Commission published its final report in 1902, McKinley had been assassinated. His successor, Theodore Roosevelt--who officially changed his letterhead from "Executive Mansion" to "The White House"--embraced the McMillan Commission's grand Neoclassical scheme for a white city on the Potomac.²³

The committee's report, although never officially approved by Congress, would affect three decades of citywide development. Its underlying ideals almost immediately prompted a major restoration of the White House. Edith Roosevelt asked commission member Charles McKim about improvements to the house, and he soon became the architect of a major renovation project, to Bingham's chagrin.²⁴ Paralleling the McMillan Commission's objective to restore Washington's central core to the visions of Pierre L'Enfant, McKim sought to rebuild the White House as it had been intended by its original architects, thereby purifying the Federal-era scheme that had been muddled and thwarted by numerous Victorian additions. By the time the Roosevelts moved back to the house in 1902, it was completely transformed. McKim had removed the conservatories west of the house and built a new entry wing on the east. The simplified exterior lines emphasized the primacy of the house's historic core with unobtrusive, yet dignified flanking wings. President William Taft oversaw the 1909 addition of the Oval Office to the existing 1902 wing, and during Herbert Hoover's administration, the west wing was gutted by fire. Under Calvin Coolidge, the crumbling roof of the White House was demolished and converted into a third floor. The east wing was renovated while Franklin Delano Roosevelt was in office, and was equipped with a swimming pool funded by donations from school children. The final major alteration to the executive mansion was enacted under President Harry Truman. Completely gutted, with only the exterior walls retained, Truman's architects built a modern home within an historic frame and added numerous underground rooms and passages to meet additional space requirements.

As all of these structural revisions changed the primary building in President's Park, the surrounding grounds were similarly embellished by its twentieth-century residents. Woodrow Wilson's first wife, Ellen, redesigned the flower gardens on the south side of the house with the guidance of landscape architects George Burnap and Beatrix Farrand. Although Ellen died before the garden was complete, the rose garden continues to be the site of ceremonies and news conferences; to complete the symmetry much later, another garden was planted southeast of the house by President John F. Kennedy's wife, Jacqueline, in the early 1960s. After the United States entered World War I, Wilson's second wife, Edith, brought sheep to graze on the

²³ Seale, 165.

²⁴ Seale, 168-84.

White House lawns to demonstrate that every possible resource should be used to promote the war effort.

In 1936 the Olmsted brothers--including Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., one of the members of the 1902 Senate Park Commission--redesigned the White House Grounds. Great masses of trees were planted to insure the privacy of the White House residents, while other trees were cut down south of the house to clear the vista to the site designated for the Jefferson Memorial. In addition to reinterpreting the aesthetic of the grounds, the Olmsted plan also dealt with the practical, realigning roadways for the most part to their current configuration to streamline the flow of traffic. Although the President's Grounds were undoubtedly private by this time and off limits to the public except by invitation, the Olmsted report noted, "the problem of policing the grounds against unauthorized intruders (including the always possible homicidal crank with designs on the president's life)."²⁵ The Olmsted brothers recommended at this time the installation of an alarm system.

As the Olmsted plan was being carried out on the White House Grounds, the surrounding neighborhood was also in transition. The area east of the Ellipse was still considered dangerous and unsightly, and although the McMillan report was more than 20 years old, concrete plans were finally made to replace the jumble of buildings east of the Ellipse with grand, classically inspired federal offices, and in 1929-36 the entire neighborhood east of the Ellipse was cleared for the massive building project. The immense Department of Commerce building was erected in 1934 along 15th Street facing the east side of the Ellipse between Constitution Avenue and E Street.

As Washington's downtown became increasingly commercial and congested with office workers, the expansive grounds of Reservation No. 1 provided welcome green space amid acres of concrete and asphalt. Although the White House Grounds were only thrown open to the public for special occasions, such as the annual Easter egg roll, begun in 1879 during the Rutherford B. Hayes administration, the grounds below Executive Avenue, called the President's Park South offered wide open space to the citizenry. Recognizing the physical and mental benefits of exercise, park planners after the turn of the century equipped the larger city parks for sports. In the 1920s the Ellipse had areas for archery, baseball, croquet, and tennis.

Due to its prominent location, it was also chosen as the site for numerous commemorative statues. The first to be erected was a memorial to Civil War Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman in a square plot south of the U.S. Treasury between 15th Street, Treasury Place, and East and South Executive avenues. The site was chosen because Sherman reportedly stood near the spot when he reviewed troops returning from the Civil War in 1865.²⁶ One of the more extensive memorials in the city, the 14'-tall equestrian statue stands atop a pedestal reached by steps and surrounded by statue groups representing the four branches of the U.S. Army. The memorial was dedicated in October 1903, and the surrounding land named Sherman Square.

Sherman's memorial was joined in 1913 with a modest fountain commemorating two prominent Washingtonians who lost their lives when the S.S.

²⁵ Olmsted Brothers, 54.

²⁶ Goode, Outdoor Sculpture, 132.

Titanic sank in 1912. The marble Butt-Millet Fountain was paid for by friends of Archibald Butt, an influential military aide to presidents Taft and Roosevelt, and Francis Millet, a noted writer and artist, who at the time was serving on the Commission of Fine Arts. In 1923 a small monument was dedicated on the north side of President's Park South directly south of South Executive Avenue. The 4'-high shaft of the Zero Milestone replaced a temporary monument placed on the site in 1919 to mark the starting point for the first transcontinental motor convoy. The shaft continues to mark the official starting point for the measurement of highway distances from Washington.

Also in 1923, the grounds of the U.S. Treasury were embellished with a 10'-tall bronze portrait statue of Alexander Hamilton, the first secretary of the Treasury. Sculpted by James E. Fraser and designed by architect Henry Bacon, the statue was erected on the south terrace of the Treasury facing Sherman Square. In 1926 the Democratic party proposed the erection of a statue commemorating Hamilton's successor, Albert Gallatin, on the north terrace of the Treasury. The 8'-tall bronze portrait was also sculpted by Fraser but funding problems and the outbreak of World War II delayed its erection until 1947.²⁷

In 1924 a memorial was erected south of the Old Executive Office Building between 17th Street, State Place, and South and West Executive avenues to honor the soldiers of the First Division of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The 80'-tall column topped by a gilded bronze statue of Winged Victory stands on a base inscribed with the names of the 5,599 men killed in the war. The monument was designed by Cass Gilbert and Cass Gilbert, Jr., and sculpted by Daniel Chester French; it was dedicated before more than 6,000 veterans on October 4, 1924.

Washington's parks reaped benefits from the Great Depression when Franklin Delano Roosevelt's make-work programs provided the labor to refurbish much of the federal land. During this era of public works, the Bulfinch Gatehouses on the Ellipse, which had fallen to disrepair, were restored. The Ellipse was further embellished with two additional monuments. A small granite shaft inscribed with the names of the original patentees was placed on the east side of the park near 15th Street. Funded by the Daughters of the American Colonists, it was dedicated April 25, 1936. Several months later, a memorial honoring the Second Division of World War I was dedicated near the southwest corner of the reservation facing Constitution Avenue. This 25'-tall granite shaft represents a doorway symbolically blocked by a flaming sword of gilded bronze.

Soon after the United States entered World War II, temporary barracks were erected near the First Division Memorial to house military police guarding the executive mansion and manning anti-aircraft guns mounted on the White House roof. The National Park Service jealously guarded the grounds from other barracks, despite pressure from the military. Nevertheless, the temporary buildings remained on the Ellipse until 1954.²⁸ Not long after the buildings were removed, the First Division Memorial was augmented with bronze tablets listing the names of division members

²⁷ Goode, Outdoor Sculpture, 370.

²⁸ Stanley, 49-57.

killed in World War II. Similarly, the Second Division added wings to its memorial in 1962 to hold the names of its World War II heroes.

One of the larger memorials on the Ellipse was erected in 1959 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of scouting on the site of the first Boy Scout Jamboree that was held on the Ellipse in 1937. The Boy Scout Commemorative Tribute, paid for by Boy Scouts nationwide, features a boy in his scouting uniform flanked by giant allegorical statues representing the ideals of scouting. The sculpture group faces an oval reflecting pool.

With the United States' entry into the war in Vietnam, the recreational and ceremonial grounds of Reservation No. 1 took on a new role as activists gathered here to exercise their First Amendment rights in view of the White House. After security-conscious police prohibited gatherings on the sidewalk north of the White House, protestors staged large Civil Rights and anti-war demonstrations in Lafayette Park and the Ellipse.²⁹

During this era of public dissent, the Ellipse remained the site of a less controversial gathering--the annual lighting of the national Christmas tree, a Colorado Blue Spruce. In 1962 the Washington Board of Trade began sponsoring the event, which came to be known as the Christmas Pageant of Peace. Thousands of people continue to gather on the Ellipse each holiday season to watch the president flip the switch to illuminate the tree. The current tree was transplanted on the north side of the Ellipse in 1973.

The most recent embellishments to the Ellipse are the Haupt Memorial fountains placed on each side of the axis of 16th Street on the north side of Constitution Avenue. Donated by Enid Haupt, editor of Seventeen Magazine, the fountains were set in place in 1969. In 1977, an east wing was added to the First Division Memorial to commemorate its members killed in the Vietnam War. The most recently refurbished area of the President's Park are the grounds of Sherman Square which were improved in the early 1990s as part of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) project.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Overall dimensions: Reservation No. 1 covers approximately 82 acres. Of these, 18 acres are enclosed within the fence surrounding the White House, twelve acres encompass the grounds surrounding the Treasury and Executive Office buildings, and about 52 acres make up the Ellipse.
- B. Materials:
 - 1. Roadways, pathways, terraces: Reservation No. 1 is sliced into a number of segments by public and private vehicular roadways. The U-shaped road running around the White House Grounds is divided into three segments, East, South, and West executive avenues. West Executive avenue remains a roadway but is closed to the public. East Executive Avenue has been

²⁹ Stanley, 64-66.

transformed into a minor roadway and a pedestrian walk. Panels of grass run down the center of the former roadway, and the paved sidewalk on the west side of the former roadway is embellished with concrete planters and elegant metal-frame wood-slat backless benches. South Executive Avenue is open to all traffic and merges with the two-way, four-lane E Street that continues, with a slight bow to the south, between the White House Grounds and Ellipse. Treasury Place, used mostly for angle parking, runs east to west between 15th Street and East Executive Avenue. State Place carries a steady stream of traffic from South Executive Avenue to 17th Street on the south side of the Old Executive Office Building.

Within the White House gates, a private circular drive leads to the north portico of the White House from Pennsylvania Avenue, with a secondary roadway leading from the west gate on Pennsylvania Avenue to a sunken parking area west of the house. The White House Grounds also include an elliptical roadway inscribed in the south lawn.

A public roadway runs around the perimeter of the Ellipse. This elliptical roadway is connected to Constitution Avenue on the south by a short roadway on axis with 16th Street and two curved roadways. It is also accessible on the north from E Street and South Executive Avenue. All roadways on the Ellipse are used for angle and parallel parking.

Reservation No. 1 is also traversed by numerous pedestrian walkways. Paths lead from each corner of Sherman Square to the central area where the statue stands. On the Ellipse, asphalt and concrete pedestrian walkways run aside the auto roads and also provide a number of additional routes from the perimeter sidewalks along 15th and 17th streets to the interior of the park. Brick walks lead to the Haupt Fountains on the south side of the park. The rectangular plaza around the First Division memorial is paved with Belgian blocks.

2. Vegetation:

- a. Grass: Most of the open areas on the Ellipse are sodded. Other groundcovering plants are used extensively on the White House Grounds.
- b. Trees, shrubs, hedges: Dense stands of trees are planted on the White House Grounds to provide privacy and security for the first family. A wide lawn provides a view to the south facade from the center of South Executive Avenue. The trees on the White House Grounds include a number of specimen trees planted by presidents over the years (See attached diagram).

The grounds surrounding the Old Executive Office Building and U.S. Treasury also incorporate various plantings. Of note are several large, old magnolias on the Old Executive Office Building grounds.

Sherman Square features evenly spaced mature pin oaks in the large groves surrounding the central monument. Low shrubs,

including azaleas, are planted at the corners of the paths and a formal hedge surrounds the central terrace.

The First Division Memorial is surrounded by a taller formal hedge, and a small grove of mature honey locusts and other shade trees are planted in the region between the memorial and E Street.

The large elliptical lawn in President's Park South is devoid of plantings other than grass. The roadway surrounding it and leading from it to the other roadways are lined with elms, many quite old. Other specimen trees are planted throughout the grounds surrounding the Ellipse.

- c. Flowers, seasonal plantings: Round concrete planters line the sidewalks and medians around the White House Grounds. They are planted with seasonal flowers such as geraniums. The Old Executive Office Building, White House, and U.S. Treasury each feature elaborate gardens off limits to the general public. Most visible are the extensive formal rose gardens on the south grounds of the U.S. Treasury. Formal flowerbeds are also included in Sherman Square.
3. Park structures:
- a. Fences, gates, retaining walls: The three main buildings in the reservation are enclosed by tall protective fences. On the north side of the White House, the fence stands atop an approximately 1'-tall random-course stone retaining-wall base. Since both the Old Executive Office Building and the U.S. Treasury have foundations below the grade of Pennsylvania Avenue, both are surrounded by substantial retaining walls. The terraces on the north and south sides of the U.S. Treasury are lined with classically styled stone balustrades. Additional security is provided around the White House grounds by heavy metal bollards between the sidewalk and Executive Avenue. The sodding on the north side of the Ellipse is protected from trespassers by low metal picket fencing as well as temporary "snowdrift" fencing. A low random-course stone wall encircles the National Christmas Tree. An elegant, wall approximately 1' tall also surrounds the central area of Sherman Square.
 - b. Benches: Park standard metal-frame wood-slat benches are placed at wide intervals around the wide path forming the Ellipse. Two rows of standard benches also face onto the horseshoe courts north of the tennis courts near 15th Street. In Sherman Square, ornamental metal-frame wood-slat benches face onto the central memorial. Backless metal-frame wood-slat benches are arranged along the pedestrian walkway on East Executive Avenue. The Boy Scout Memorial is surrounded by yet another type of bench, a simple backless bench comprised of a concrete-base with wood slat seats.

- c. Lighting: Washington Globe standards are used almost uniformly along all of the roadways traversing this reservation and in the central terrace of Sherman Square. Special historic standards are incorporated in the stone fenceposts around the Old Executive Office Building.
- 4. Statues, markers, monuments (In clockwise order from the north--see HABS sheet for locations):
 - a. The bronze portrait statue of Albert Gallatin on the north side of the U.S. Treasury was sculpted by James Earl Fraser and erected in 1947. It faces north onto Pennsylvania Avenue from the sunken terrace on the north side of the building.
 - b. A replica of the Liberty Bell is located on the terrace leading to the west entrance of the U.S. Treasury. It was placed on the spot in 1950 to commemorate the original in Philadelphia.
 - c. The 10'-tall bronze portrait statue of Alexander Hamilton on the south side of the U.S. Treasury was sculpted by James E. Fraser, and its base was designed by architect Henry Bacon. It was erected in 1923 and stands on a checkerboard-pattern paver terrace facing south.
 - d. The Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman monument was erected in 1903. The elaborate sculpture group was designed by Carl Rohl-Smith and includes a 14'-tall bronze equestrian statue of the general atop a large pedestal embellished with bas-relief and sculpture groups. At the base of the sculpture group is a mosaic pavement including names of Sherman's battles. This central square terrace is surrounded by benches, a formal hedge, and an elegant stone retaining wall.
 - e. The Zero Milestone marker, the official starting point for measurement of highway distances from Washington, D.C., was designed by Horace Peaslee and erected in 1923. The stone shaft stands along the sidewalk on the north side of the Ellipse, due south of the White House.
 - f. The Memorial to the Original Patentees of the District of Columbia was sculpted by Carl Mose and designed by Delos Smith. The 7'-tall granite monument was dedicated in 1936 and stands on a small paved square aside the sidewalk along 15th Street.
 - g. The Boy Scout Commemorative Tribute, designed by architect William Henry Deacy, includes a 12'-tall bronze group including a boy scout flanked by allegorical figures. Sculpted by Donald DeLue the group stands atop a simple pedestal facing southwest onto an oval pool surrounded by a concrete-paver sidewalk with concrete benches.
 - h. The Memorial to the Second Division was designed by architect John Russell Pope, sculpted by James E. Fraser, and erected in 1936. Consisting of a large panel with a central opening symbolizing a doorway blocked by a tall flaming sword, it faces south onto Constitution Avenue. It is flanked by low walls and two flagpoles.
 - i. The Memorial to the First Division was designed by architect Cass Gilbert

and sculptor Daniel Chester French and erected in 1924. The rectangular plaza surrounded by a formal hedge stands on elevated ground south of State Place. The monument itself consists of an 80' column topped by a gilded statue of Winged Victory. Slabs at the west and east side of the rectangular plaza commemorate First Division soldiers killed in World War II and the war in Vietnam.

5. Fountains, pools:

- a. The White House Grounds include three fountains. Large fountains are located on both the north and south lawns, and a smaller fountain is incorporated in the pedestrian plaza on East Executive Avenue.
- b. The Butt-Millet Memorial Fountain honors Maj. Archibald W. Butt and Francis Davis Millet who lost their lives in the sinking of the S. S. *Titanic*. Erected in 1913, it was designed by sculptor Daniel Chester French and architect Thomas Hastings. It stands on a point of land near the intersection of Ellipse Road, South Executive Avenue, and E Street.
- c. The Haupt Fountains flanking the entrance to the south side of the reservation were erected in 1969. The granite slabs were sculpted by Gordon Newell and designed by architect Catherine Henry.
- d. The Boy Scout Commemorative Tribute, constructed in 1964, includes an elliptical pool that is 40' at its longest point.

6. Buildings:

- a. The State, War and Navy Building, now the Old Executive Office Building, has stood in the northwest corner of Reservation No. 1 since 1882. The five-story Second Empire structure is sunken slightly beneath the grade of Pennsylvania Avenue to the north.
- b. The White House, the primary building in Reservation No. 1, stands on the north side of the reservation, south of Pennsylvania Avenue. It was begun in 1792 and has been renovated and enlarged numerous times since. The White House Grounds also include a number of ancillary buildings used for security.
- c. The U.S. Treasury Building stands in the northeast corner of Reservation No. 1. The north segment of the building was built in 1836, and the structure was expanded to the south in 1869.
- d. Two gatehouses designed by architect Charles Bulfinch stand on the south corners of the Ellipse. Originally erected around 1828 on the grounds of the U. S. Capitol, they were moved to the Ellipse in 1880 and restored in 1938.
- e. Today the Ellipse includes a number of temporary buildings in the northeast corner used for visitor information. Since the Ellipse is the gathering place for White House tour participants, it also includes three large sets of bleachers covered by tent-like canopies.
- f. A permanent facility for visitors is currently under construction. Designed by Mary Oebrien and Associates, the colonnaded one-story

structure will stand northeast of the Ellipse Road.

C. Site:

1. Character of surrounding structures: Reservation No. 1 forms the north-south portion of L'Enfant's L-shaped greenway opening south onto the expansive Monument Grounds and Tidal Basin. Buildings facing the Ellipse from the east and west were located and designed with respect to the large park. The Department of Commerce creates a rhythmic colonnaded facade along the entire east side. The west side includes grand edifices of the national headquarters for the Organization of American States, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the American Red Cross and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. North of Pennsylvania Avenue is Lafayette Square, formerly a part of the appropriation, flanked by two city blocks that feature a mix of low-rise historic buildings, federal buildings, and the towering New Executive Office Building and Court of Claims. The buildings facing the Old Executive Office Building from 17th Street and the Treasury Building from 15th Street include office buildings and several prominent hotels.
2. Traffic patterns: The four major roads surrounding the reservation--15th and 17th streets and Pennsylvania and Constitution avenues--as well as E Street, which runs through it, all carry several lanes of heavy two-way traffic.
3. Vistas:
 - a. View slightly southeast from the White House to the Washington Memorial.
 - b. View due south from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial.
 - c. View north from the White House of Lafayette Square and up the 16th Street axis beyond.
 - d. View from the White House Grounds northeast along New York Avenue to Mount Vernon Square.
 - e. View southeast from the Treasury Grounds along Pennsylvania Avenue to the U.S. Capitol.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Boschke, A. "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia surveyed in the years '57, '58, and '59."

Ellicott, Andrew. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1792.

L'Enfant, Pierre Charles. "Plan of the City of Washington." 1791.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations Under Control of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds." 1884, 1887, and 1894.

- B. Park plans and early views: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans and early views. Additional plans are located at the Office of Land Use, National Capital Region.

1851: Path and planting plan for President's Park by Andrew Jackson Downing.

1877: Plan of Reservation No. 1 showing buildings, plantings, roads, and pathways, OPB&G (NARA RG42).

1886: Utility plan showing paths, buildings, and underground pipes (Annual Report . . . , 1886).

1894: Plan showing proposed walk around the "Parade," (Annual Report . . . , 1894).

1919: Road plan of President's Park South (NARA RG 42).

1929: Survey plan of Ellipse with list of features (NPS).

ca. 1985: Plan of Reservation No. 1 (NPS).

D. Bibliography:

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Reservation Files. Office of Land Use. National Capital Region Headquarters. National Park Service.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold, Project Historian
National Park Service
1993

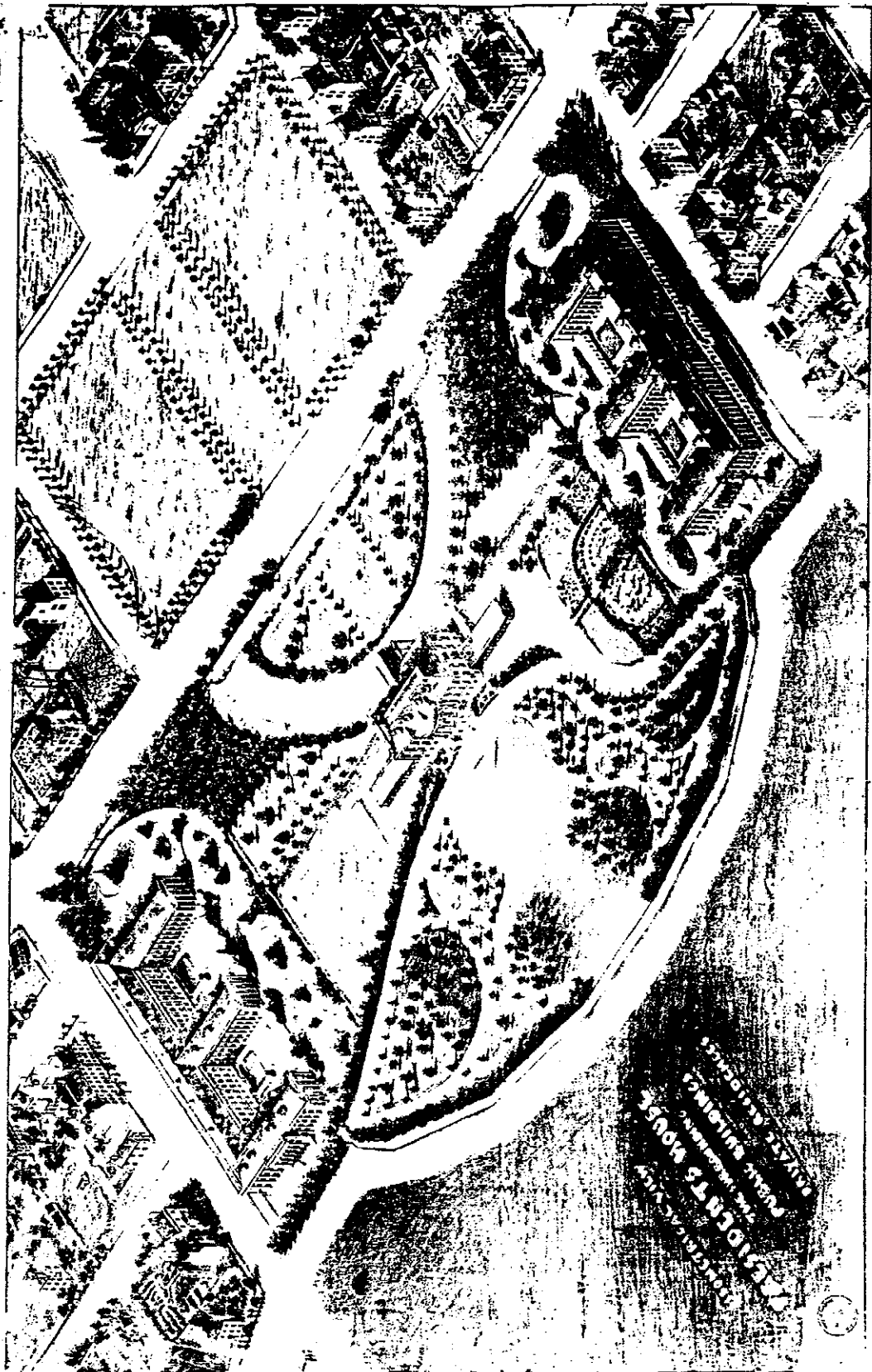
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.

PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

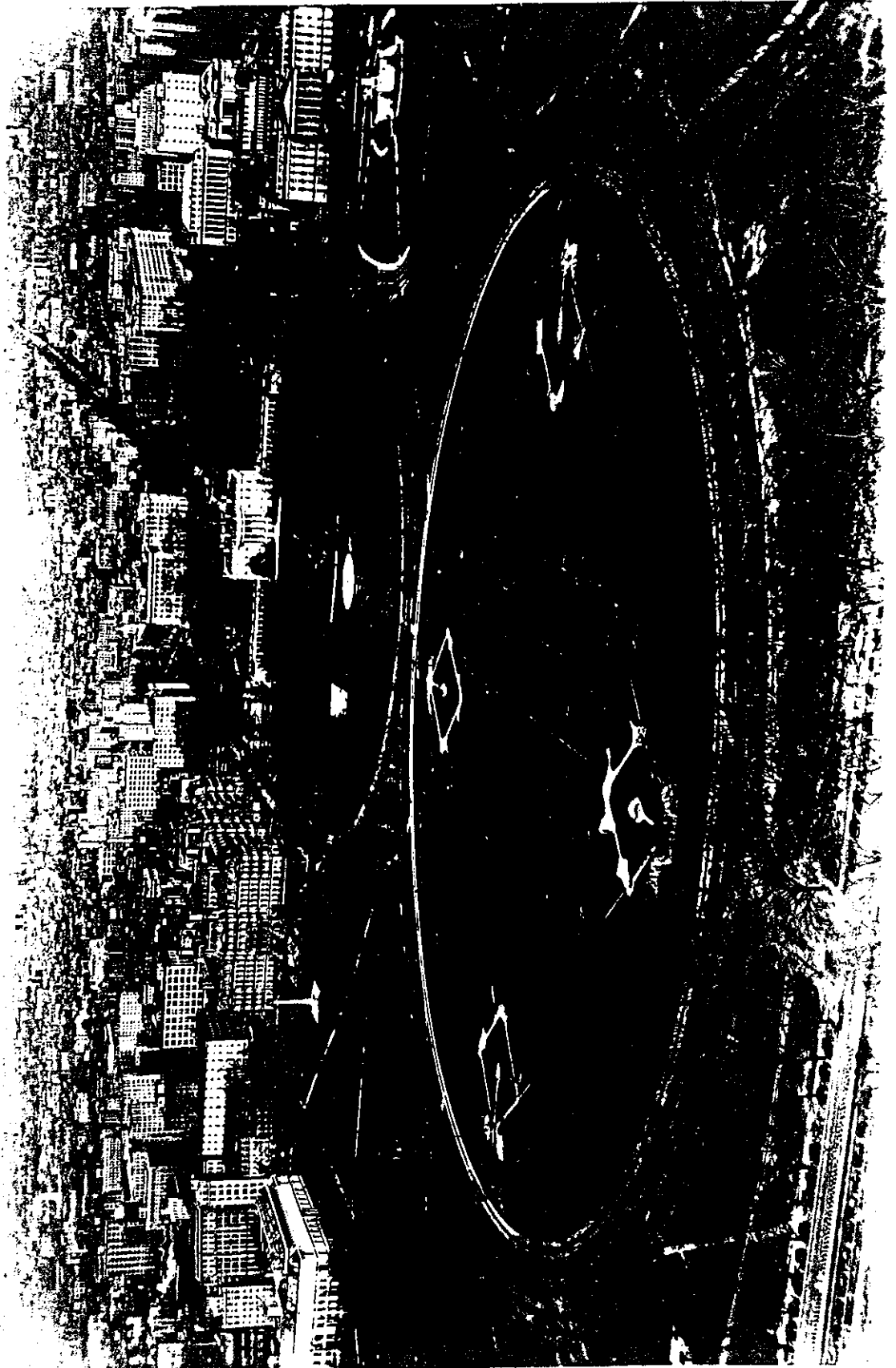
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|---------|-----------|--|
| Page 21 | ca. 1850: | "Isometrical view of the President's House, the Surrounding Public Buildings, and Private Residences" (Library of Congress). |
| Page 22 | ca. 1900: | Aerial view of the Executive Grounds. |
| Page 23 | ca. 1927: | Aerial view of Ellipse and White House Grounds, looking northwest. |
| Page 24 | 1929: | Survey plan of Ellipse with list of features (NPS). |
| Page 25 | ca. 1985: | Plan of Reservation No. 1 (NPS). |
| Page 26 | 1993: | White House Gardens and Grounds Guide. |



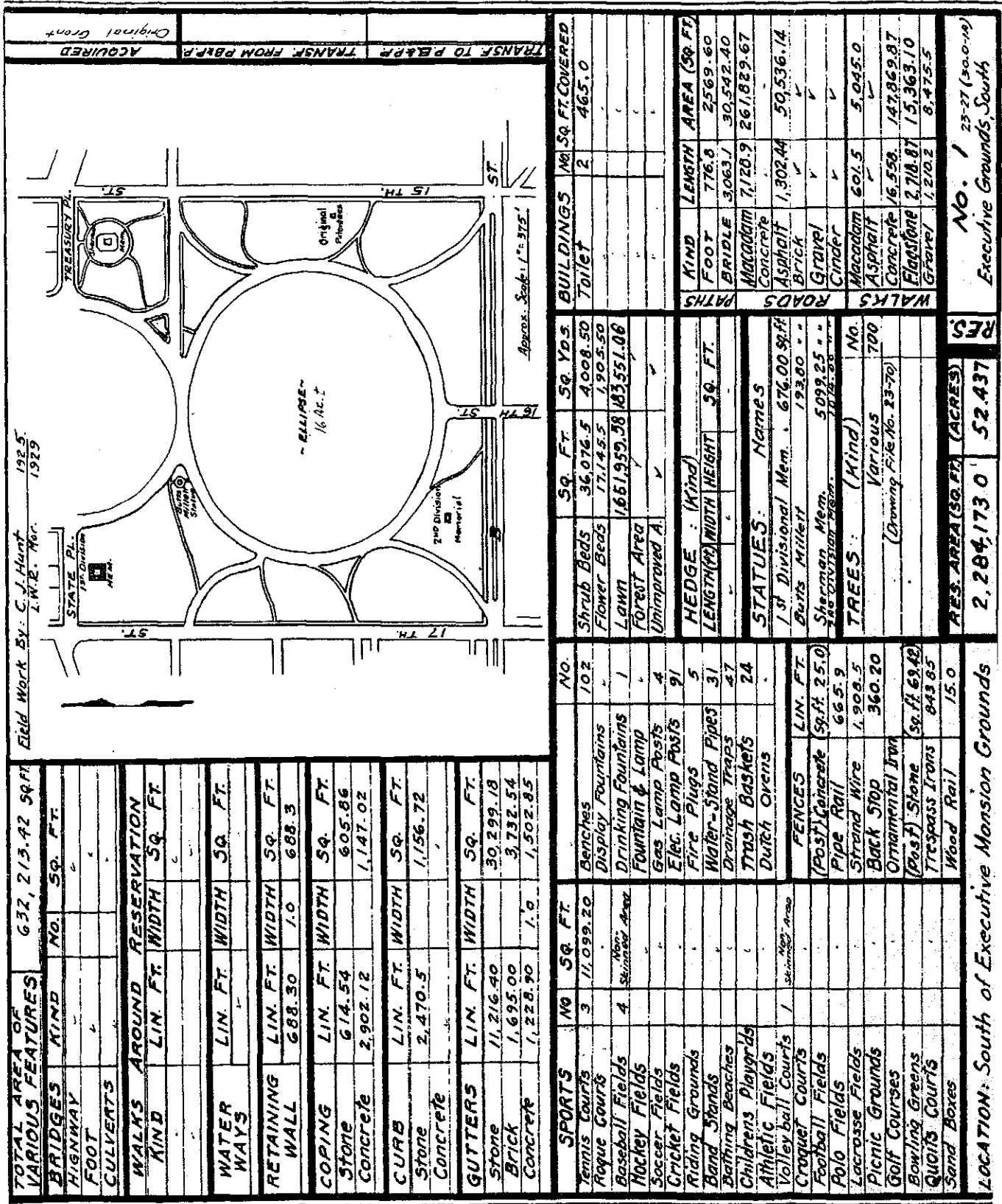


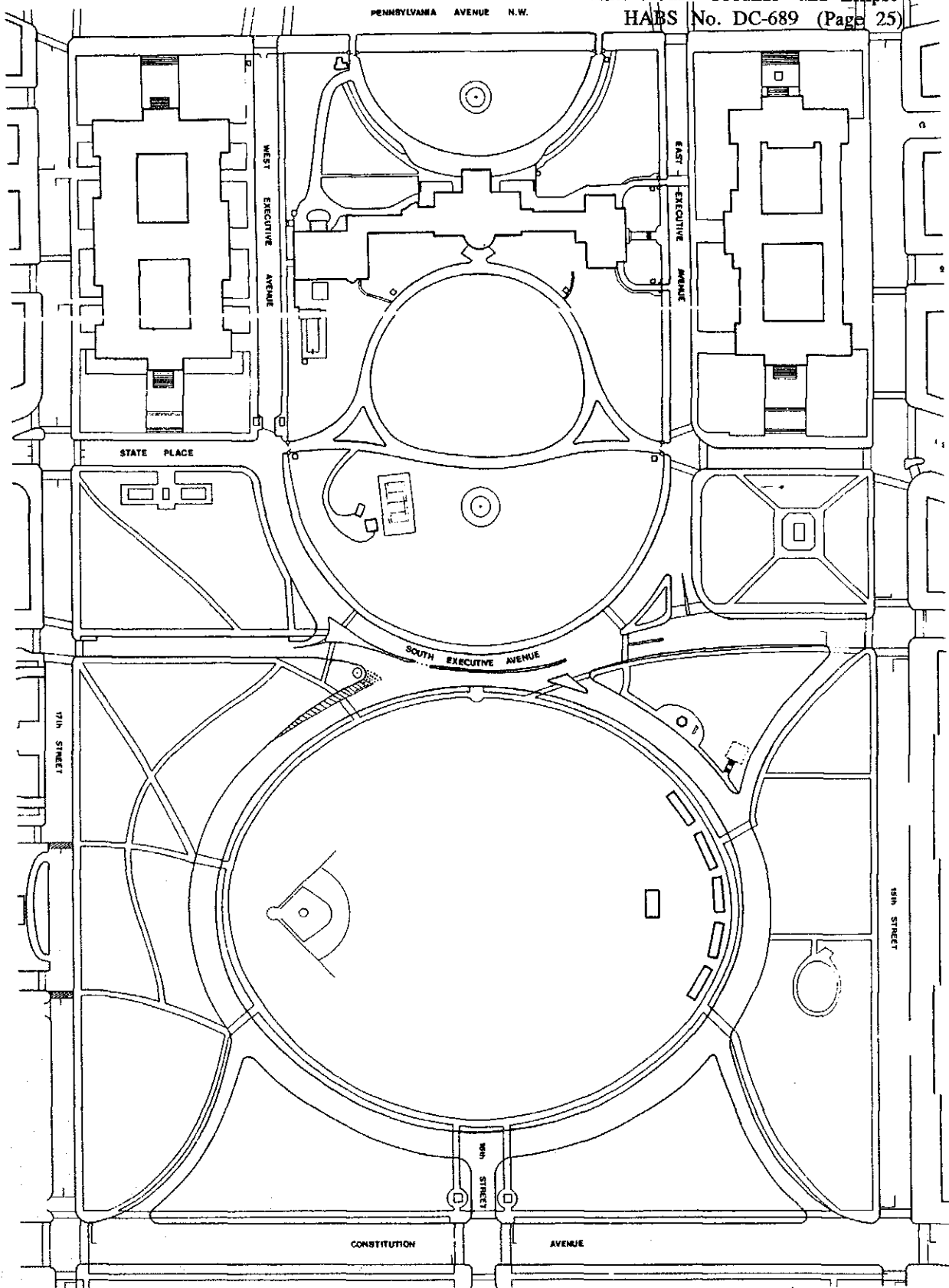
TAKEN ABOUT 1900

~ EXECUTIVE GROUNDS - SOUTH ~

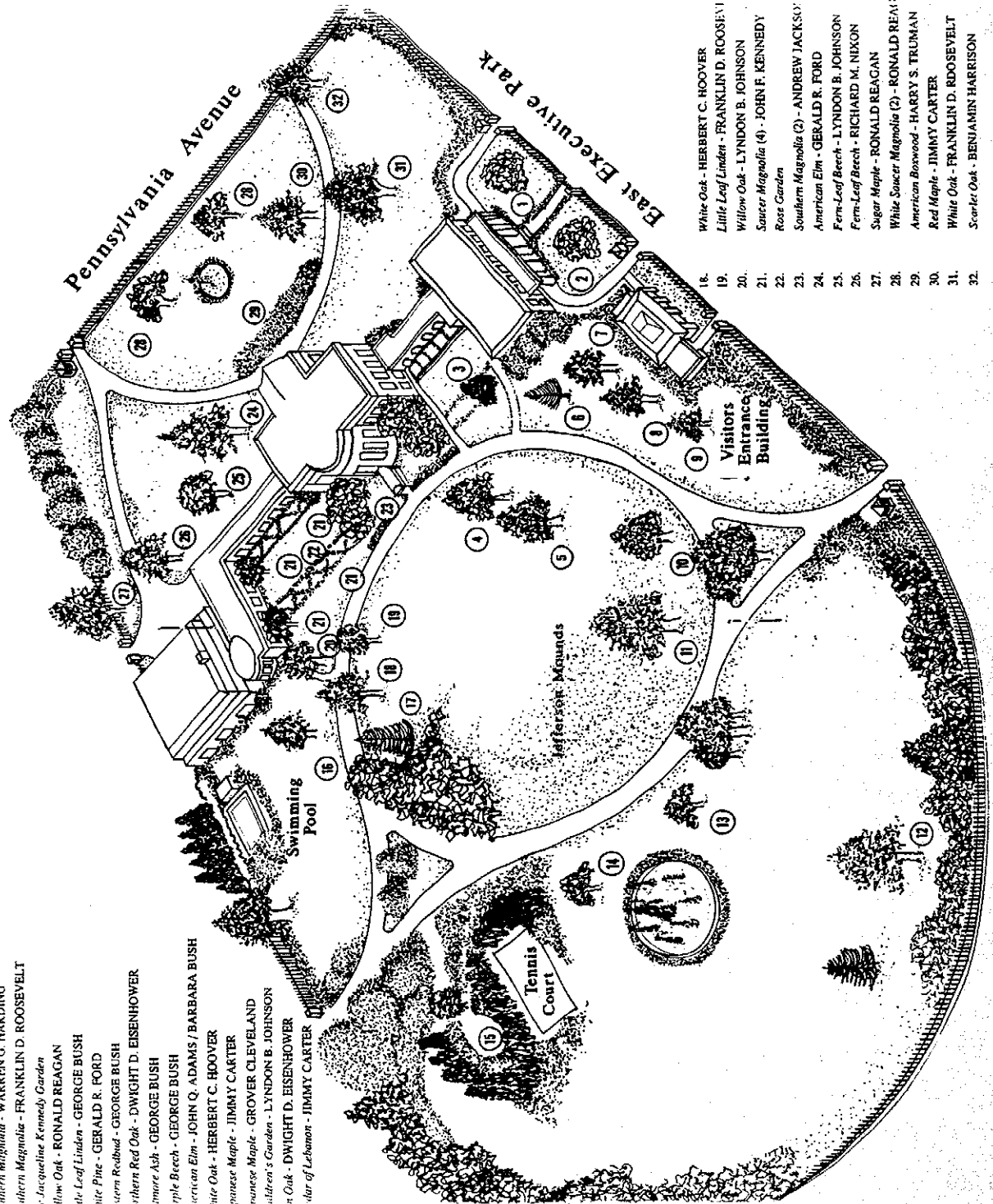


2. 1927





White House Grounds and Ellipse
HABS No. DC-689 (Page 26)



1. Southern Magnolia - WARREN G. HARDING
 2. Southern Magnolia - FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
 3. Jacqueline Kennedy Garden
 4. Elm Oak - RONALD REAGAN
 5. Elm Leaf Linden - GEORGE BUSH
 6. Elm Pine - GERALD R. FORD
 7. Elm Redbud - GEORGE BUSH
 8. Elm Red Oak - DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
 9. Elm Ash - GEORGE BUSH
 10. Elm Beech - GEORGE BUSH
 11. Elm Elm - JOHN Q. ADAMS / BARBARA BUSH
 12. Elm Oak - HERBERT C. HOOVER
 13. Elm Maple - JIMMY CARTER
 14. Elm Maple - GROVER CLEVELAND
 15. Elm's Garden - LYNDON B. JOHNSON
 16. Elm Oak - DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
 17. Elm of Lebanon - JIMMY CARTER

18. White Oak - HERBERT C. HOOVER
 19. Little Leaf Linden - FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
 20. Willow Oak - LYNDON B. JOHNSON
 21. Sycamore Magnolia (4) - JOHN F. KENNEDY
 22. Rose Garden
 23. Southern Magnolia (2) - ANDREW JACKSON
 24. American Elm - GERALD R. FORD
 25. Elm Leaf Beech - LYNDON B. JOHNSON
 26. Elm Leaf Beech - RICHARD M. NIXON
 27. Sugar Maple - RONALD REAGAN
 28. White Sycamore Magnolia (2) - RONALD REAGAN
 29. American Boxwood - HARRY S. TRUMAN
 30. Red Maple - JIMMY CARTER
 31. White Oak - FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
 32. Scarlet Oak - BENJAMIN HARRISON